

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH BOB SCHIEFFER ON CBS-TV PROGRAM, "FACE THE NATION,"
WITH DAVID MARTIN
WASHINGTON, D.C.
DECEMBER 4, 1994

MR. SCHIEFFER: We're going to start this morning with the situation in Bosnia. Defense Secretary Perry is with us here in our Washington studio. Also joining us this morning -- CBS News national security correspondent David Martin.

Well, Mr. Secretary, let's start with where you think things are right now. It appears that there have been still more snags. I guess at the least one could say the Serbs have shown no interest in accepting the peace proposals that have been put forward. How would you sum it right now?

SEC. PERRY: I'd sum it up, first of all, by noting that the situation on the ground is what I would say is a stalemate. We have the Serbs having gained some real advantage in the Bihac area. The Muslims continue to make advances in central Bosnia. The advances that the Serbs are making in Bihac may not be extendable to other parts of Serbia. They take account of very special features in that area -- namely, the nearness of the Croatian Serb forces. They are the so called Krajina Serbs. And also the separatist Muslim units which are fighting alongside the Serbs there.

So the government forces are at a special disadvantage in Bihac and have fared poorly there. On the other hand, they continue to do well in other parts of Bosnia. So I say the situation on the ground is at a stalemate, and that suggests to us that a peace plan is best for all parties are concerned, and that's what we continue to push. Now, we're not making the progress we would like to make toward that peace plan. As you know, the contact group's peace plan has not been accepted by the Serbs, and we're seeking ways of reinvigorating the process of the contact group.

There have been several meetings over the weekend in that regard. You're familiar with the contact group meeting on Friday, and since that time Ambassador Redman has gone to Bosnia, met with the Bosnian government, and with the encouragement

of the Bosnian government, met with the Bosnian Serb officials. Prime Minister -- pardon me -- Foreign Minister Juppe and Hurd will be visiting Yugoslavia -- former Yugoslavia -- to visit Milosevic in Belgrade today and tomorrow.

So the process is moving forward now, and I have some hopes that it will be reinvigorated by this.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Mr. Hurd, who you just mentioned -- the British foreign minister -- said just last night, though, that if something doesn't happen soon, in the next -- in a matter of weeks, the United Nations may have to consider withdrawing all its forces. Do you agree with that?

SEC. PERRY: Well, first of all, he said that they were going to commit to keeping the UNPROFOR forces there for this time. So there's no plans to pull them out now. His statement that, if some progress, some real progress, is not made after some number of weeks, they will have to reconsider that. And I think that is a real possibility. And, as you know, the NATO has been asked to look at plans for extracting -- assisting in the extraction of the U.N. troops if they're requested to do that.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, this is not just a few Marines going in to help the Marines that are off shore now. This is a gargantuan operation to get all of those troops out. How extensive would that be, and how big a project would that be, Mr. Secretary? And how would it work?

SEC. PERRY: NATO is still going through that planning study, so I don't have final answers on that yet. But you're right. It's not a small activity at all.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, you're talking about thousands of U.S. military personnel to get something like this done.

SEC. PERRY: Many thousands of NATO personnel, and the U.S. would participate in that in some way. The details of what the operation would be have not yet been determined, and the details of how the United States would participate have still not been determined.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Secretary, let me back up to the first thing you said. You said there is now a stalemate on the ground in Bosnia. This time last week you were saying that the Serbs had achieved military superiority. What's changed in this week? As far as I can see, the only thing that's happened in the past week is more Serb advances and fewer NATO threats to do anything about it.

SEC. PERRY: Nothing has changed in the last week. I think my comments were misunderstood at the time. I was speaking then about the situation in

Bihac -- that is, the situation in Bihac then, as now, was that the Serbs had gained a very definite advantage. There did not seem to be any real prospect of the Muslims gaining that -- gaining advantage back in Bihac. But I do point out, and I commented the very day after that interview, that the Muslim government forces are very strong in central Bosnia. And I repeat that again now. I would say on balance, looking all over Bosnia, that the situation is close to a stalemate, and it's been that way for well over a year now.

MR. MARTIN: But it seems that in the past 10 days or so everything's changed in Bosnia. The U.S. was pursuing a policy that was built around pressuring the Serbs into accepting a peace agreement. Now the U.S. seems to be pursuing a policy which is built around enticing them, some would say making concessions to the Serbs, in order to get them to accept an agreement. Would you acknowledge that the Clinton administration has made a major change in policy here?

SEC. PERRY: No. I would not say we made a major change in policy. I'd say the tactics have changed, and they've changed by recognizing simply what has happened. But the policy remains to seek a negotiated settlement, to seek for a cease-fire followed by a negotiated settlement leading to a peace. That has been our policy from the beginning.

Now, the policy also has been that use of military and the support of that has been focused on limiting the spread of the war and on limiting the violence in the war and providing humanitarian aid. It continues to do that. The use of the military, in this case the NATO air force, to put pressure on the Serbs is what is primarily a question here, and what was demonstrated in Bihac is that that is very limited if the UNPROFOR, the U.N. forces on the ground, refuse to ask for this support.

Now, we have by no means given up NATO airpower as a means of putting pressure on the Serbs. We will continue to propose that when appropriate.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, let's --

SEC. PERRY: We proposed it in Bihac, but it was not accepted.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about that just a little bit, because as you well know, Senator Dole, the -- who's going to be the majority leader in the Senate next time around, Speaker Gingrich now, a lot of Republicans on Capitol Hill are talking about pulling the U.N. forces out of there and starting a bombing campaign. Now, what's wrong with that and what is the possibility of that happening?

SEC. PERRY: What is wrong with it is that a unilateral lifting of the embargo and a unilateral striking will certainly mean the end of UNPROFOR. It'll mean the end of the U.N. force there. The British and the French and others have told us that they would pull their forces out.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But, if I understand the Republicans, they're saying that's fine, let's get the U.N. forces and then bomb.

SEC. PERRY: That overlooks a fairly important problem -- the transition, how you get the forces out, which we talked about just a moment ago. This would promise to be a very difficult operation. It also overlooks the question of what function the UNPROFOR has been performing the last year and a half. As frustrating as this situation is, and I admit I am frustrated as well as other people are, I have to compare it with what our realistic alternatives are. And the realistic alternative, which is simply pulling the U.N. forces out of there, will give up the advantage that that force has had. It has saved tens of thousands of lives by its presence there.

And so pulling it out means the war is going to be greatly increased in intensity. There are going to be more casualties, not fewer.

MR. MARTIN: Let's go back to this question of helping UNPROFOR pull out. You said that the U.S. would assist NATO in some fashion in that. Are you willing to say that the American assistance would take the form of U.S. combat troops on the ground in Bosnia?

SEC. PERRY: If we get a request, if NATO gets a request for this, for this assistance, the U.S. will participate. Now, based on what the request is and based on the form of the assistance that's needed, the United States at that time will decide what the form of assistance is. We're not ruling anything out or anything in at this time as to how it is we would assist. But if NATO is in there in an operation, the U.S. will be a part of it.

MR. MARTIN: But the numbers you hear, at least in the hallways of the Pentagon, are two divisions, two NATO divisions, of which, you know, some portion, perhaps one division, would be American. I mean, is that the scale of operation we're talking about here?

SEC. PERRY: Yeah, I can't confirm any numbers at this time, David, not simply because I don't want to confirm a fact, but because the fact isn't there yet. The planning is still in process. And it will -- and in any event the plan will depend on the circumstances at the time that the request is made. But it is not a

small operation. It is not a small operation I would certainly want to --

MR. MARTIN: Would you want to go to --

SEC. PERRY: Two thousand Marines aren't even close to doing what would need to be done.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You're talking about tens of thousands of U.S. troops then?

SEC. PERRY: The overall operation is certainly going to be more than 10,000 troops. The role of the U.S. in that is yet to be determined, but we would participate.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Would you find it necessary, would you think it necessary, to go to the Congress to ask permission to do this before you embark on an operation like this?

SEC. PERRY: We would consult very carefully with the Congress before any commitment of military forces of that sort to Bosnia, of course.

MR. MARTIN: Are we not in a situation where sooner or later the U.S. is going to have ground combat troops in Bosnia. If, as seems unlikely, there is a peace settlement, the U.S. is committed to putting in a peacekeeping force of some 25,000. If the policy fails and UNPROFOR is withdrawn, the U.S. is committed to assisting, probably with ground troops, in the withdrawal of UNPROFOR. One way or another, it seems U.S. troops are going into Bosnia.

SEC. PERRY: Those are both plausible alternatives of how the future might evolve, and both of those alternatives would involve some use of U.S. military forces, including the possible use of ground forces. In the latter case, in the extraction case, it would be limited in time. They would go in and perform their mission and come out again.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Mr. Secretary, Time magazine in its issue coming out this week, says that you have been told that France is trying to use this to drive a wedge between the United States and Britain, among other things, because they really want to see the breakup of NATO. Is that so?

SEC. PERRY: I don't get that impression at all from my discussions with French officials. In particular, what I have firsthand information on is my discussions with the French minister of defense. I'm in frequent communication with him. We have an effective, a congenial working relationship. I see no evidence of that kind of split. I know that the French traditionally for decades have had different views about the U.S. role in NATO than the U.S. has had, but we have managed to work together very effectively all during those years. I believe we will continue to work effectively in NATO and with the French.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Mr. Secretary, we're going to have to leave it there. Thank you very much for joining us this morning.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you.

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REMARKS TO THE PRESS FOLLOWING INTERVIEW ON "FACE THE NATION"
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Q: How far is the U.S. willing to go to extract U.N. troops from Bosnia?

A: First of all, let me say, we've not been requested to extract the troops from Bosnia. And, indeed, the British and French foreign ministers, at the meeting of the Contact Group over the weekend, reaffirmed that they were going to leave the UNPROFOR forces there for this period of time.

There is a possibility that circumstances may develop, which will cause them to be extracted. If that happens, and if NATO is requested, the United States would certainly participate in any NATO extraction operation if it comes to that.

Q: Are we talking thousands of troops, or tens of thousands of troops?

A: The NATO planning for this possible extraction operation is still underway, we don't have... I don't think its profitable to go into specific numbers... This would not be a small operation.

Q: Why hasn't NATO taken-out the anti-aircraft batteries around Bihac?

A: NATO aircraft are there to fly air cover, to stop... Its an operation called Deny Flight, the purpose of that is to stop other airplanes from flying. They continue to do that, they continue to be successful to do that. They also may be asked to provide air cover for the U.N. forces. If they are asked to provide that air cover, then they will do it.

Now, if, in the course of this, they are engaged by an air defense system, then they will attack that air defense system -- that's been their rules right along and that's what they've done right along. They have not been engaged lately, so that issue has not come up.

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Q: Can I ask you one question on readiness? Are we at a level where our forces are enough? We have a lot of hot spots in the world where we could get pulled into.

A: The U.S. deployed forces and the U.S. forces are ready for deployment, on the highest state of readiness they have ever been. These forces are ready to go and they're very, very capable. We have -- as we announced a few weeks ago -- three of the reinforcement divisions that are not up to full readiness level because of the supplemental funding that was needed to get their training accomplished was not approved in time. That funding has now been approved, the training has been scheduled, and those three divisions will be at their full readiness levels within a month or so.

Thank you.

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